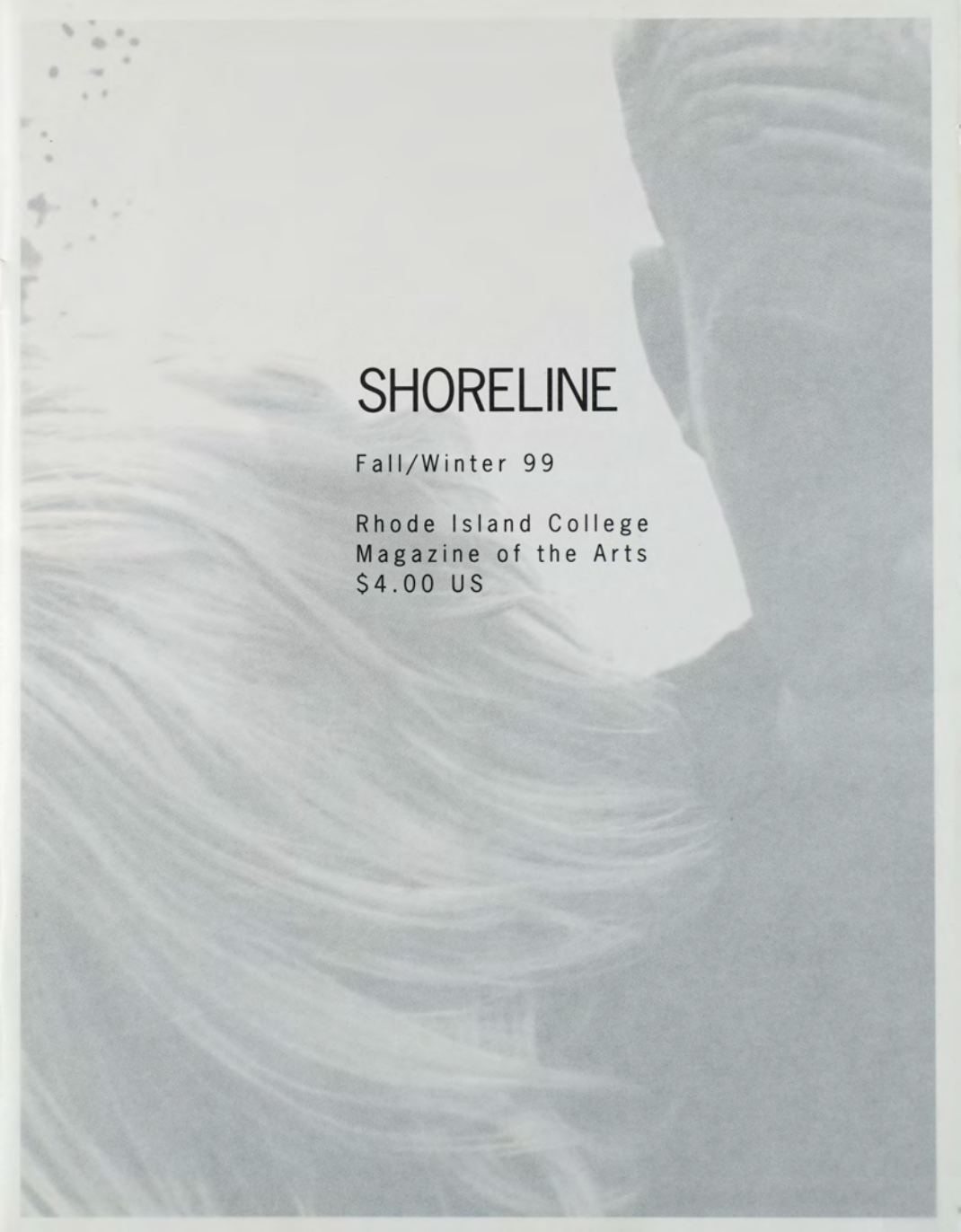

SHORELINE

Fall/Winter 99

Rhode Island College
Magazine of the Arts
$4.00 US

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Shoreline

Fall/Winter 99

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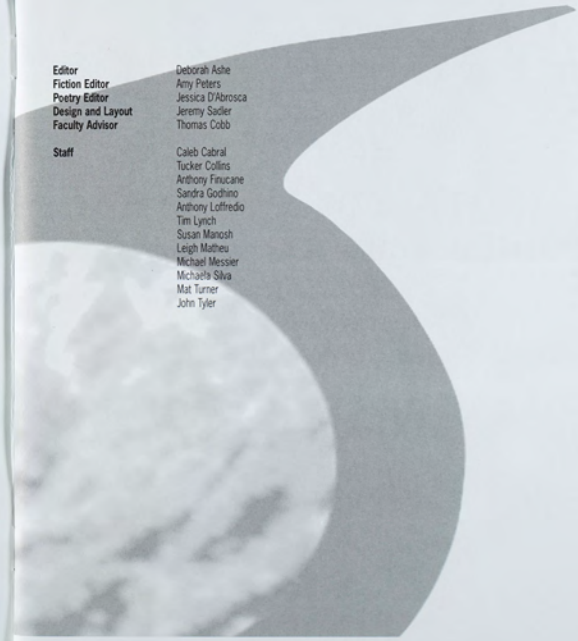

Poetry and Fiction:

Photography:

Stephen Carter

My mother has stories. The first that I remember came in the car on the way to the supermarket. I knew there was something wrong by the way she was driving. She was all over the road, she took wrong turns. I had to keep reminding her of the direction we needed to go, the point to our drive. "Your father was an airplane mechanic in World War II," she said.

"Stay in your lane, Mom. Take a right here."

"He was fixing the engine on a Boeing while he was stationed in France." Her stories are always unexpected. In the middle of things, they take hold of her. I'm never sure what to do with them when they come. I didn't tell her that a Boeing is a passenger plane, or that I didn't think they were around during the war. I know that if I ignore the story, if I let it pass without notice, everything will return to normal, like nothing ever happened. When she has a story in public, I try to act like nothing is unusual about it, and I go about my business. Everything works out fine. "Why did you turn here? You should have gone straight there." I offered to drive her car but she refused.

"He hit a fuel line and the engine exploded. That was how your father died." My father lives in Newark.

"Stay in your lane," I said.

Every Sunday morning for the last eight years, four parishioners from St. James Cathedral follow the pastor out of the church during communion. They walk across the street to the front door of the apartment building at 137 Lockwood Road. Standing close in the small hallway, just inside the building, the four parishioners pray while the pastor administers the communion wafer to Mrs. Bell, a seventy-year member of the congregation.

Every Sunday morning for the last eight years, Mrs. Bell has stood in the hallway by her apartment door, in a light pink dress cut to the knee and a tilted white hat pinned with a pale grey ostrich feather, waiting for the body of Christ. Her old Pekinese, Curry, follows her out of the apartment and into the hall and naps while she waits. Mrs. Bell clutches a tiny, white patent leather purse and looks out the window for the pilgrimage, nervous like a teenager who expects her date to have forgotten their plans. Finally she sees them coming. She straightens her dress and touches a string of pearls around her neck. With a solemn face and a deep breath, Mrs. Bell opens the door.

The visit is always awkward for the churchgoers. Mrs. Bell stopped crossing the street for mass long before any of them joined the congregation, so the parishioners know her only through the charity of the church. They stand and say nothing. They say, "Good morning, Mrs. Bell," and thank God under their breath that they're not old and alone. "We've come to share with you our communion this week." The pastor talks loud so she can hear him. He leans into his speech and compliments Mrs. Bell on her curled hair. "You do get younger every week," he says.

Mrs. Bell's husband died eight years ago in their apartment, on the sofa that she now sleeps on because it's better for her back than the bed. Towards the end of his sickness, he was moved from the bed to the sofa, where he slept for three days, until he stopped breathing. It was a lingering disease, so Mrs. Bell had some time to get used to the idea of his going before he actually went. Curry was just a puppy then, and he slept on Mr. Bell's chest until it stopped rising and falling under him. Then he jumped down and curled up by the fire and slept there instead.

The pastor introduces everyone to Mrs. Bell. "Well, this is Mary Kate, and this is Charles, and Gregory, and you remember Hannah." Mrs. Bell hasn't been able to cross the street since the year her husband died. When she was sure he was dying, she was glad to be the church's neighbor. When he went, she thought, he would only have to cross the street. And then she could cross right behind him and have some company with the living. She could spend all her time there. But after his constant, jarring cough, after the puppy and the end, she couldn't move.

The pastor holds the wafer over Mrs. Bell, and everyone else clasps their hands and bows their heads in prayer. Curry opens his eyes and yawns. When things with Mr. Bell took a turn for the worse, and when everyone was sure he would soon pass on, the church bought Mrs. Bell the baby Pekinese. "This is the body of Christ." Mrs. Bell says "Amen," and accepts it in her mouth. The dog wags his tail and paws her dress, so Mrs. Bell opens the door, lets him out into the backyard, and her visitors out into the street.

"Your mother lives in a house of horrors, like you care." I visit my mother on Fridays. She is Mrs. Bell's neighbor. She lives in the front apartment and Mrs. Bell lives in the back. Their doors face each other across a small entryway. We sit at the kitchen table. Or more accurately, I sit at the kitchen table, and my mother circles about me, telling me a story. She snatches an empty drinking glass from her place at the table, a crumpled napkin from in front of me. Gibbet is her Pomeranian pup. He sits on my lap and licks my hand while I stroke him and read the morning paper. I like to catch up on the local news when I'm visiting my mother.

"Do you know what sound a dead dog makes?" she asks.

"Is this a joke?"

"No sound, that's what. That's funny to you? 'Is that a joke?' he says. A dead dog makes no sound. That's your idea of funny?"

"No. It's just that–"

"So if it's not making any sounds, how do I know it's there?"

"Can't you see it?" I'm reaching for something. I don't tell her that her questions are confusing me.

"Of course I can't see it on the other side of the door. If I could see it I would know it was dead. Then I could open the door and help the girl there holding it. To me, I don't know who she is. I don't know that she has what she says that she has. How do I know that she has what she says that she has? How do I know she's not lying? Or she has her facts confused? I don't know. Something's not right, that much I'll say, when a girl is at my door and banging hard even though it's two-thirty in the morning, and she's crying and yelling through the door to me. 'Help! Please somebody help me! Please! My dog is dying!' she says. Bam! Bam! Bam!" She yells it and knocks the air with her fists to make sure I'm listening. "She sat on the floor, whispering 'Don't die, Don't die,' back and forth with a dog in her lap, like that's what I needed to hear. She was rocking it."

I hold the newspaper up like a door between us, but I can't avoid her talking. I put it away and look down at Gibbet on my lap. I imagine him dead: his eyes wide open, dried blood in his fur, his tongue lolling. I push my chair away from the table and look out the window. She's putting dishes in the sink now and wiping the table. She can't stop talking. She circles around me still. I look down again at Gibbet-this time his front legs are broken and his ears are bleeding. I stand up and push him off my lap. I walk into the living room and turn on the television, refusing to let her surround me.

"Did this happen?" I ask. "I'm con—"

"And then I have you here, my only son: 'Did this happen?' 'Is that a joke?'" My mother dulls her facial expression when she mimics me, so that my questions seem dense. "You don't even know what goes on in this neighborhood, what with me here all alone."

'I don't know what goes on here,' I say.

'There's the first smart thing you've said all day.'

'Didn't Mrs. Bell hear anything?'

'Of course, Mrs. Bell heard it, too. Eventually, she opened her door. Crazy old woman wants to risk her life, she can. I'm not. She can, but I'm not. I didn't know what was happening. All I knew was everything went quiet all of a sudden. I almost opened the door just to peek. Then I heard the old woman. On the phone with the police. That's how I knew she opened her door. That's how I knew she was crazy. She wants to risk her life, fine. But don't go calling the cops down here, like they're not down here enough already. I felt she shouldn't have done that. She should have brought the girl inside and given her some soup and asked her what the dog's name was. God knows I would've, but what could I do all alone? Or she should have helped the girl dig a grave in the backyard and lay the dog in it at three o'clock in the morning . . . she should have left the dog in the hallway and adopted the girl.' Her mouth hangs open, and she rubs the backs of her teeth with her tongue. That means she is thinking.

'The police came. I could hear them in the hallway talking to the old woman and the girl: the girl says she saw the car, the old woman asks about the dog, they say they're taking it with them. On and on and on, I could hear it. She says she wants to know about the dog and what they'll do with it. She starts to cry, closes her door. Meanwhile, the dog is silent. The dog has been completely silent.

'They knock on my door and say 'Police,' like this is really what I need, right? So I open my door and the girl's looking at me. I don't look down, but I don't have to to see that there's a dead dog in my hallway. They ask if I have a garbage bag, and so I get them a white one from under the sink. The girl's looking at me.'

I kiss my mother on the forehead. 'Bye, Mom. I really have to go.' The stretch of Lockwood Rd. outside my mother's apartment building is darkly paved and straight. The church across the street is a predictable, well-balanced piece of neo-Gothic architecture. I long to descend the apartment steps and rest my eyes on them.

'From my window, I watch them in the lights of their car. One pushes on the top of the girl's head and eases her into the backseat, and one heaves a white garbage bag containing one dead dog into an open trunk. The church is a big shadow standing over them.'

'Really, Mom. Bye.'

'They drive away, leaving it there, dark like that.'

'Bye.'

Mrs. Bell is in the back hallway sitting on the stairs and crying.

'Hello, Mrs. Bell.' I pretend not to notice her tears. 'You know, Mrs. Bell, my mother is all alone in the front right now. Why don't you say hello?' I can't make my way past her.

'All the doggies are dead!' she yells.

'All of them?'

'All of them!'

'How'd they die?'

'Last night. Last night they killed them. My dog, too.' Her face is in her hands.

'Curry died last night?' I kneel down to rub her back.

'Yes, all right? Curry's dead. He's dead. He's dead, dead.'

'How?'

'The police. The police took him away. Last night. The police and a girl did it. The girl did it.'

'That was your dog? I thought it was her dog.'

'It was mine, it was mine.'

'Did you bury him? Do you need help burying him?'

'I couldn't. He's gone. The police took him away. They took him away.'

'Why?'

'They said it wasn't my dog.'

'Why?'

'I don't know. I don't know.'

'Did you show them his license? Did he have a license?'

'No . . . No . . . '

'Well, Mrs. Bell, you—' I begin to say but I realize there's no point to any of it, so I just kneel there and rub her back while she cries into her hands.

On Saturday morning, Mrs. Bell waits in the small hallway between her and my mother's doors for four parishioners to come to the house. She wears a light pink dress cut to the knee, and a white hat with a pale grey ostrich feather pinned to its wide brim. She clutches her white, patent leather purse and looks out the tiny window, but nobody comes.

After a while of nobody coming, she sits down on the stair and thinks of ways she'll explain to them Curry's absence by her feet. When he was given to her, the church promised to buy his food for the first four months, and they paid for his first shots. The pastor visited every weekend to see how much he'd grown. Church dog, she used to say, before she thought of a name. During the three days before her husband's death, she sat on the couch and watched tv with her baby dog and her dying man. She thought the sight of them was sad enough to tear the building down. A church dog, a Catholic wife, and a man a month from the afterlife. The holy three. She waits and says, 'He's dead. He's dead.'

My mother opens her door and sees Mrs. Bell crying by herself in the hallway. 'Mrs. Bell, are you OK? Are you waiting for somebody? Mrs. Bell? You're not waiting for those people from St. James, are you? Today's Saturday, Mrs. Bell. You know that today's Saturday, don't you?'

'No. Nothing. Nobody.' Mass must have ended by now. Mrs. Bell stands up and goes into her apartment.

In the Folds
Jessica D'Abrosca

I remember how you would fold
laundry on Saturday mornings,

Forcing plastic school shirts,
waxed work jeans and

Dull hand-me-downs
into unnatural shapes.

A medical student with her cadaver,
you split sweaters down the middle

Mechanical textbook hands
bringing shoulder seams together,

Breaking the arms back
with a surgeon's grace,

You created piles of neatly
pressed patients.

I would sit across the kitchen table
wiping your cigarette smoke and

Pancakes from my eyes, waiting
to tell you it was all wrong.

Wishing you would just fold shirts
like they do in department stores–

Collars and buttons facing up, out

Shouting at you 'they don't look
like that in my friend's drawers!'

It's all wrong.

My mind was made up then,
I was going to be someone

Something, anything but you,
Folding clothes on Saturday mornings

Knotting your fingers, losing them
In the folds of clothes you didn't wear–

Sacrificing a Saturday for demanding buzzers,
an eternal wash cycle fading with the rinse cycle–

So I folded different
I folded like the stores,

Placing my shirts sideways in my
dresser drawers knowing you hated it.

'That's not how we do it,' your scolding
voice tumbled over and over, I didn't care.

Today I even roll my sheets into little
Balls because who's going to see them

Except me, an occasional lover who
doesn't mind the wrinkles of sheets

Slowly gathering stains from lazy
mornings of orange juice, fresh air.

Sometimes nights at the coin laundry
are lonely, the air heavy with

Burnt coffee, the empty clanking of
quarters fed to washing machines.

I stare through its glass door hypnotized
By the round and round of shirts and socks,

My hands work automatically
Not with me, but with you.

Caught by ordering buzzers
like your finger waving in my face,

I notice my shirts are split
down their bellies, arms

Pinned back, collars and buttons
down and in,

Neatly piled next to balls
of rolled up bed sheets.

My Left Breast
Sandra N. Godinho

The mirror doesn't lie.
There is nothing there to touch.
All I can do is trace the angry scars
disfiguring my alabaster flesh
with red and pink criss-crosses.
White flesh stung by knife,
by scalpel,
by radiation.
Where once my nipple pacified hungry children
and fed the desire of hollow men,
fertility has been eliminated.
The home of my left breast
has been bombarded by nuclear activity,
leaving the landscape raw and blistering.
The bandages don't help the healing process:
They pull skin,
unevening terrain.
Some areas have more layers than others.
The gossamer web of stretch marks,
like roads signaled on travelers' maps,
no longer tattoo my breast.
The whole landscape has been demolished,
and I am left with an emptiness that no one can imagine.

Debra Gustavson

Satellite
Amy Costa

The summer Nel turned nine, a satellite became unhinged in the sky and threatened to crash into earth. She had never been afraid of outer space before, or of anything it contained. Now, some force of physics had knocked this satellite from its gravitational pull, and the newscasts were full of speculations as to where the fragmented pieces would fall. What size would they be? How hard would they hit? How many houses would get crushed?

Nel had been born the year men landed on the moon and had never lived with the idea that space was foreign and unreachable. She wanted to be an astronaut and refused orange juice in the mornings in favor of Tang, because that's what the astronauts drank. Her older brother, Gene, had told her only boys could be astronauts, but when she began to cry, he took it back. She would sneak into his room and stare at the picture of the earth taken from the moon, a hazy blue ball surrounded by space as dark and soft-looking as the velvet of her mom's dress-up bag. She wanted to see that view for herself one day.

The year before she had visited Florida with her family, before her father had been laid off. They spent a day at Kennedy Space Center, where Nel walked around in awe, much more impressed by the Center than she had been by Disney World. Tucked away in a side room was a life-sized spacesuit. It looked huge to Nel, and puffy, as if it were made of marshmallow. There on the sleeve were the American flag and "USA." When she walked behind it, she realized the back was cut out so that people could walk right up to it and stick their faces through the hole in the helmet, and they'd look like astronauts. She made her mother take two pictures of her in the suit, in case the first didn't come out.

She had been impressed by how small the insides of the spacecrafts were. She worried that maybe she would go all through astronaut school and then realize she hated small spaces, so she turned off the lights in her room at bedtime and shut herself in her closet. There, amid the clothes, shoes, and toys on the floor, she curled herself up tightly, closed her eyes, and practiced hurtling through space. She held her breath for as long as she could, in case she lost her oxygen supply. Sometimes she fell asleep in the closet and would wake up disoriented, her head resting on a pile of books and her leg numb.

She had only considered the galaxy as a place to visit, not as a place things shot out of. When she looked up at the nighttime sky, trying to pick out the constellations, she thought of flying into the stars and seeing the constellations from the inside out. She never thought of a shooting star as something which might land someplace. So when she began to hear about the satellite that was falling to earth, the whole idea came as a surprise. The family was eating dinner when she first heard the news on the evening broadcast.

'What did he say?' she asked, interrupting her brother's tale of baseball practice.

'What did who say?' Gene asked, annoyed.

'On the news. About the satellite.'

Her dad looked up from the evening paper's want ads. 'I heard that earlier. Some satellite is falling back to earth.'

'Falling where? The desert?' she asked.

'No one knows,' her dad answered, going back to the paper with a sigh.

As Nel got ready for bed that night, she stared at the sky through her window defensively. She imagined a piece of the satellite hitting her house and killing everyone she loved. It was up to her to save them-her mom, Gene, and especially her father, who had looked so sad lately. She decided she'd have to watch the sky night and day so that she could warn them in enough time to get out of the way.

The next morning at breakfast she listened to the radio, tuned to the AM talk station, hoping to hear that the satellite had landed in Australia, as far away as possible. But it was still up there, somewhere, threatening. When her mom walked in, she flipped the radio back to the FM disco station.

'Are you O K, sweetie?' her mother asked as she began the coffee for her dad, who was sleeping later and later, spending more time in bed.

'I'm fine,' she said. She knew her mother already worried enough about her dad. She didn't want her to realize they could all be crushed by a huge hunk of metal at any time.

'Can you clean up the kitchen for me this morning? I have some errands to do.'

'Sure. Where are you going?' Her mother was dressed in a skirt and blouse, her usual sandals replaced by smart, wedged heels. A faint smell of Nina Ricci floated behind her.

'I'm going to . . . a, a, job.'

Nel just stared at her mother. Gene, who had been walking by the kitchen, bat and glove in hand, stopped by the door but he too was speechless. Their mother had never worked.

'It's only for the summer, until your dad goes back to work. He'll be with you during the day. You won't be alone.'

They just nodded. Nel couldn't imagine her dad taking care of them while her mom went off to work. Her mom made sure there was lemonade and cookies every afternoon; she found Nel's favorite barrette every time she lost it; she dispensed kisses with Band-Aids when they scraped their elbows. Her father just sat on the couch most of the day, watching tv without noticing it. Nobody else's mom worked. Nel wondered if they were poor now.

After kissing her mom good-bye and cleaning up the mess of breakfast, Nel began her watch of the sky. She sat on the front steps, trying to re-read the Bobsey Twins-the one where they visit the Tower of London, which usually scared her so much she wouldn't keep the book in her room at night. But today she couldn't concentrate on it. At the end of every paragraph, she looked at the sky. Her brother startled her, riding his bike across the lawn and skidding to a stop in front of the steps.

'What are you looking at the sky for?'

'No reason. Go away.'

'Freak!' he yelled as he took off towards the street again. Go, she thought. She felt noble, worrying for everyone and protecting them from certain death.

Around lunchtime she went inside to make a peanut butter sandwich. Her father was sitting at the kitchen table, holding a cup of coffee, one hand supporting his chin. He had closed the shades against the sun.

Nel hesitated by the door to the kitchen.

'Dad?' He slowly looked up, a brief smile crossing his face.

'What is it, sweetie?'

'Are you OK? I mean, do you want lunch or something . . .?'

'No, it's OK. But thanks.'

'Are you sure? I'm making myself a peanut butter sandwich. It's no trouble.' She sounded like her mom, when her friends came for cards and coffee.

Nel's dad looked down at his mug again, and then up to his daughter.

"Sure, Nel. That would be great. A peanut butter sandwich would be fine."

She made the sandwiches, placing her dad's on a plate and setting it before him on the table. After cleaning the kitchen carefully, she took her own sandwich outside to eat on the steps. All afternoon she kept her vigil, until her mother came home from work and asked for her help with dinner.

As they all sat down to the table, her mother asked again if she was feeling all right. "Gene said you didn't leave the yard all day."

"I'm fine," she answered, before Gene could butt in about her watching the sky. She didn't want her mother to get suspicious. "How did the job go? What are you doing all day?"

Gene kicked her under the table, too late. Her father rattled the paper loudly, cleared his throat, but did not raise his head.

"I'm in an office honey. Don't worry about it. It was fine. Jim, more salad?" she asked, starting to get up.

"I'm fine," Nel's father answered softly, in what had become his normal voice.

Nel turned towards the tv and the evening broadcast. Some local news about a small grocer driven out of business by the new "super" market, Carter making a speech about something. The satellite hadn't landed yet. Nel sighed, quietly, so no one could hear.

"More peas, Nel?" her mother asked.

Nel could see the worry on her mother's face. "Sure, Mom," she said smiling. "Thanks!"

That night Nel knelt by her window watching the sky. She wasn't sure what to look for in the darkness. She figured during the day a piece of falling metal would be easy to see, but at night she wasn't so sure. Would it glow, from falling so fast and re-entering the atmosphere? A bright burning sphere, it would crush her house and then set it on fire, burning to death those trapped inside. She could see her house clearly, a smoldering ruin, and her an orphan, the fate she deserved for not protecting her own family. But suppose the satellite didn't begin to burn right away? It would still be hard to see, and she strained her eyes against the blackness, looking for an out-of-place shape. An owl flew from the woods behind the house across the street. Nel was looking so hard she could see the shape of the small animal in its beak. The sky began to get cloudy and as Nel strained her eyes even more, she fell asleep, leaning on the sill.

She awoke to the sound of her parents' voices in the bedroom next to hers. Some stray drops of rain hit her face and arms. As she stretched, her mom's words filtered through her sleepiness-"job," she heard, and then, "money." Her dad's responses were few and soft. "But the kids . . ." Nel heard her mom say, before she stumbled to her bed and fell back to sleep.

In the morning, it was still grey but the rain had stopped. Nel woke slowly, stretching her limbs, still cramped from hours sitting by the window. As full consciousness arrived, a sharp guilt hit her. She had fallen asleep on watch. Looking out her window, she wondered how she'd be able to see anything today with all the clouds in the sky.

She must have slept late, because her mother was already gone. A note was on the fridge, asking her to clean the kitchen once again. She pulled out a bowl and a box of cereal, and ate breakfast quickly. She washed the dishes quietly, trying not to wake her father. As she rinsed the suds off her hands, her parents' argument from the night before came back to her in full sharpness for a minute and then blurred, like a remembered dream. She felt the same stab of pain in her stomach she had felt upon awakening. Her mind stretched back, but she couldn't remember ever hearing her parents argue before. She shook her head, trying to clear it of the memory of their words, and dried her hands. By the time she had changed into shorts and a tee shirt, the sun was just beginning to come out.

She ran outdoors and found a game of kick-the-can going on among all the kids in the neighborhood-a couple were about Gene's age, and a few were younger than Nel.

"Hey," Gene said. "Why don't you play, instead of reading all day?" He said it in a teasing voice, but she was grateful for the invitation. She sat down on the curb next to the kids who had been tagged, and waited for the next round. She watched Roy, who lived down the street, try to defend the dented can of Tab from everyone else. Gene had already been tagged, along with all but two of the players.

Nel was intent on trying to spot the last two, who were hidden well, when Lynn, sitting next to Gene, pointed at the sky and yelled, "Look!" Nel's stomach lurched and her eyes began to sting before she even lifted her head. She was sure it was coming straight for her house.

"Wow, a rainbow," Gene said, and then, looking at his sister, noticed her tears. So did everyone else.

"What's wrong with her?"

"Why are you crying?"

"What's her problem?"

She heard Gene say, "Aw, just leave her alone," as she ran away, the tears flowing quickly now. Cutting through the side yards of the houses across the street, she ran into the woods. She didn't stop running until she reached a favorite spot, where a large boulder rose up out of the packed earth. She flung herself to the ground, panting and sniffling.

She curled up with her side against the flat of the rock and cried. She could feel the cool, damp surface of the rock through her clothes, and as it chilled her, she began to calm down. Gradually she quieted and turned so that her back rested against the boulder.

She pulled her knees to her chest and looked up at the pieces of sky which were visible through the leaves above her. She could see the faint remnants of the rainbow off to her left, and could just make out the very top of her roof. The sight of it offered no comfort. Her mother seemed far away, downtown, working in someone else's office. Her father was equally out of reach, someplace quiet and sad. She sat there for a long while, alone, listening to the sounds of the squirrels and birds as she waited for the sky to crash down all around her.

Fulton St.
Leigh Matheu

Down at the end of Fulton St.
there's an Ocean
Beach
With underground bathrooms
whose doors have rusted
shut
no longer safe to use

Golden Gate Park
stumbles
to an end there
Never managing to make
the leap
over California-wide concrete
separating it from the
cold
changing tides of the
Pacific

The drag strip stretches
off into the
sunset
District in one direction
Going the other way it
climbs
the hilly mounds of the city's man-made
flesh

At the top lie the ruins
of an old bathhouse
covered
in moss and slime
Salty fingers
snatch
at the soft limestone
dragging
it towards the sea

People gather there to listen
at Seal Point
Restaurant
to the barks coming
out of the mist
They quietly chew their
meat
so that everyone can hear

Surfers protected in
rubber
ride each swell into oblivion
While joggers plod
along over broken shells
taunting
the sea with their ability to
run

Down at the end of
Fulton St.
there is an apartment
with pink carpet and
a cramped kitchen that
smells
like burnt cookies
The stucco walls
slope
downwards, eager to
divulge
their borrowed stories

Of love exploding
fireworks
on the beach
holiday tunes sung at
midnight
and the faint echo of a
girl
whose laughter
lingers
in the rolling fog

Grandma's Song
Deborah Ashe

Just not right
tobacco-brown
shoe-shine black
mixin' up with
angel-wing white
and beach-sand beige.

Bad idea
nappy knots
twisting 'round
shimmering shafts
paraffin-pumped mouth
smothering a
porcelain-painted smile.

Not good at all
jungle-trained haunches
clutching on
city-savvy curves
vulgar-visibility
descending on a
crescent moon.

Just not right
Bad idea
White girl
lovin' a
colored.

Sitting
Anthony Loffredio

How much does smoke weigh.
Smoke can weigh anything.
Smoke weighs what we are lost in,
smoke can weigh years.
Sitting
Sitting in the anger of
where we've been dropped off
in the lonely way station,
the wind finding its way in every opening.

There are giant, lonely wails
coming from the mountains tonight,
trains that complain of the darkness
reach us from down the hill
into the valley on the park bench,
where we sit and wonder what to do next.

Cold hands clutching bags with belongings
and memories that weigh them down.
Leaves scratching their fingers along
the pavement begging not to go,
needing more time to understand
as the wind tumbles itself down the mountains
doing what it will.

So this is where life has brought us,
a crossroad without signs
a way station standing in a place
where it is always the end of summer.
And strangers looking at other strangers
wonder who will go where next.

Do I take a train entering.
Do I take a train leaving.

And these trains have no destinations.
They know just as much as you do
sitting there in your overcoat
and scared to move or breathe or smile,
too uncomfortable to perform
in these pantomimes of staying
before you've even managed to go.

Girlfriends
C. Ady
in memory of a friend

Beth Hays was thirteen and could not decide which of her mother's cosmetics she should steal that night. Her fingers slid over the hard, colorful bottles, tubes, and jars that cluttered the top dresser drawer in the bathroom. Beth leaned towards the open door, wary of her mother's prosecuting footsteps, and listened as her hands swam through the layers of beauty products. She liked the sound of searching through makeup, the satisfying thumps and pops that came with every pass, as heavy glass nail polish bottles pushed against the smooth surfaces of her mother's compacts.

Anxious about getting caught, she settled, as usual, on an old bottle of dark brown mascara and a jar of crimson lip gloss. These had become Beth's Friday night saviors for her recent weekly trips to the mall, and because they could be easily washed off, her mother would be none the wiser. However, since Beth was not brave enough yet to actually purchase her own makeup, she was relegated to choose from those cosmetics that she knew her mother would never use for herself. The mascara that she picked should probably have been thrown out months ago, since all that really remained was what had clumped and dried itself onto the bristles of the brush. The lip gloss, though, was just about unused. Her mother had gotten it as a free gift for buying so many dollars worth of makeup all at one time, but she had opted never to wear it in public because it was too "gaudy." Beth estimated that for the most part her secretive makeup thefts were secure.

What Beth really wanted to wear was eyeliner, though. She envisioned her eyes as deep and seductive, with those dark lines underneath them. Her brown eyes would shimmer with mystery. Right now, though, the only eyeliner her mother owned was the waterproof kind, and she had made that mistake once already. She had scrubbed tearfully at her eyes in the mall's rest room, disbelieving that someone would go and invent something that could never be washed off, and now she knew to read labels before drawing on her face with anything that was not supposed to be there.

Beth sighed and slipped the mascara and lip gloss into the pockets of her jeans and checked herself in the mirror. The shapes of the cosmetics in her pockets were not discernible, but she did notice with a special hatred reserved for these moments of reflected scrutiny that the concealed supplies made her look wider. Her new suede brown loafers had been chosen tonight in place of her usual pair of sneakers, and a white button-up blouse instead of a tee. She only hoped that Jane would be wearing something grown-up too, so Beth would not be embarrassed by her. She had strapped on her recently purchased cotton training bra without too much awkwardness, though she did have to check over her shoulder at the mirror to locate the clasp. There were several feverish attempts of bending over, tugging down at the edges of the thin, elastic cotton, and then scooping her repositioned breasts back into the cups before she gave up, flustered and red-faced. She was, as the instructions in her latest copy of Teen magazine had explained, creating the illusion of cleavage for small-chested women, though she did admit to herself, she was not entirely sure of the definition of "cleavage."

As she stared at her reflection in the mirror, she eyed the places where the makeup would soon be. Already, she thought, she looked at least fourteen, and once the makeup was on, maybe even fifteen or sixteen. This was good, since Brian was sixteen. She glanced at the clock on the wall and scurried downstairs.

"Mom, can we go yet?" Beth asked, holding out the car keys.

"What's the rush?" her mom asked. "Jane won't disappear if we're a little late, and God knows, the mall will still be standing." She turned off the television, picked up her purse, and took the outstretched keys from her daughter's grip.

"I just don't like being late is all. Some people like to be on time," Beth replied, her tone defensive. In the car, Beth covered her pockets with her elbows to hide the cosmetics, and they drove to Jane's house without speaking.

As soon as their car pulled up to the house, Beth hopped out and strolled, with her hands shoved deep in her pockets, up to Jane's front door. When the door opened, Beth saw that her friend had not taken her advice to dress any better than she usually did. Jane's dirty Keds were covered with blue ink scribbles and scuff marks. Jane had a habit of standing with one foot on top of the other, so that the toes of her shoes were always a filthy shade of grey. Jane's jeans were all hand-me-downs from her older sister, and never fit her like they should have, in Beth's opinion. And her bright pink Mickey Mouse shirt was not tucked in. Beth was particularly bothered by this because she felt Jane should show off how skinny she was more often. Maybe then boys would start to like her.

"Hi, Beth," Jane said, happy to see her best friend. "It's okay, we can talk. My mom's upstairs with the baby," she added, noticing Beth's eyes searching past her into the house.

"Good. Listen, when we get back to the car, remember, you're shopping for your mom's birthday present this week, and you need my help. Got it?"

"You know I can't lie very good though. I'll try. You can't just tell her you're meeting someone there?"

"No! Are you nuts? My mom would kill me if she knew I had a boyfriend. She says I can't date until I'm fifteen. You know that. There's no way I could tell her. She'd make us break up."

"So he's definitely coming? I mean he got his car fixed and everything? That's good, huh?

"Of course that's good. What are you asking me that for?" Beth snapped, her irritation increasing. As they headed out of Jane's house and back to the car, she mused with a guilty sort of glee that she might even let Brian kiss her in front of Jane tonight. The two girls got in the car, and Beth rode in the back seat with her friend as they drove to the mall.

"Are you wearing your seat belt, Jane?" Beth's mom asked, glancing into the rearview mirror at her daughter's friend.

"Yes, Mrs. Hays," Jane answered.

"Good. You know it's my fault if we get in an accident and you're not wearing one."

"Mom, come on," Beth complained, embarrassed by her mother's chronic insistence on seat belts.

"Yes, Mrs. Hays, I know," Jane answered.

"I don't worry about my own driving," Mrs. Hays continued, ignoring her daughter. "But you never know what kind of nuts may be driving around with you."

"I always wear my seat belt. Don't worry about me," Jane said.

"We always wear ours, too. Right, Beth?" Mrs. Hays said, eyeing her daughter in the dark.

"Sure, Mom," Beth said, angry at this conversation. She never wore her seat belt anymore if she could help it. That was why she sat in the back.

As she dropped them off, Beth's mother called after them. "I'll be back at 8:30. Be waiting for me right here. Unless you want me going in there to search for you. Did you remember your watch?"

"Yes, Mom. Good-bye," Beth said as she leaned over to give her mother a kiss, almost forgetting to check around first to see if anyone was looking. As the car pulled away, Beth and Jane headed in, straight for the rest room, like they had every other Friday night for the past three weeks.

"What time is it, Jane?" Beth asked as they pushed open the Ladies' room door. "I lied to my mom. I don't really have my watch on," she added.

"Um, about 6:15. What time is he supposed to show up this week?" Jane asked as she watched Beth empty from her pockets the borrowed cosmetics.

"He said 6:30. How do I look?" Beth questioned while she smeared a chunk of glowing red lip varnish onto her mouth.

"You look nice. You're positive he's gonna show up this week, finally?"

"Yes, I'm sure he's going to be here. I already told you, last week he said his car broke down, the week before that he had to baby-sit last minute, and the week before that his car broke down, too, remember?" Beth explained as she scraped the dry mascara brush across her pale lashes. "How does this look?"

"Nice."

"You want to put some on? It washes off easy."

"No thanks."

"Why not? It'll be fun."

"I don't know. I don't want to is all."

"Why are you being such a baby today?"

"I'm not. It's just I don't want to."

"Fine. Suit yourself," Beth said, "but it would've made you prettier." Beth stuffed the make- up back in her pockets and sulked out the door with Jane following behind.

They had been dating for a whole month now. Brian was her first boyfriend. He was

sixteen and could borrow his mother's car any time he wanted, he had told her. She had met him in gym class, and he was the first boy to ever flirt with her. When she was with him she blushed and her underarms started to sweat. The day he asked her to "go out" with him, she seemed to feel something important give way in her, and she said yes, not so much as a choice, but because at that moment, there were no other words that existed. Sometimes, when she and Brian walked through the hallways together, Beth would see her girlfriends clustered together and leaning towards each other, and giggling about some shared secret. Then Beth would wave and they would smile, but she would keep on walking.

Last Friday, like all the others, Brian had not shown up. But he had said he would be here this week for sure, so Beth waited with Jane by the fountain, and wished that she had brought her watch.

"What time is it now?" Beth asked, searching through the crowds of people shopping that night.

"6:57," Jane responded, picking at a hole that was growing along the side of her shoe.

"Well, then, he should be here soon," Beth said, feeling a hot blush forming on her cheeks. The past three weeks they had waited by the fountain until it had been time to meet Mrs. Hays outside. Beth had not allowed them to move from the assigned meeting spot by the fountain, for fear that if Brian showed up, he might not see them and think that Beth had stood him up. This week though, Beth was certain that he was coming. He had promised her without a doubt he would make it.

"Do you really like him?" Jane asked in a sudden gust of irritation and confusion.

"Yes, of course I like him. He's my boyfriend, duh."

"Well, aren't you at least mad that he's never shown up, and he's not here yet?"

"Look I already told you, his car keeps breaking down, and he had to baby-sit once. And tonight he's just late, that's all. Why should I be mad for that?"

"I don't know, but it just seems kind of dumb to spend all this time just sitting."

"Listen. You can't understand because you've never had a boyfriend, Jane." Beth said in a vicious effort to close the conversation.

"Well, if this is what it's like, I'm glad I don't have one," Jane muttered as she continued to pick at her shoe. They sat in silence, Beth glancing over each face that walked past, and Jane watching her friend's frantic eye movements as if they were hypnotizing her.

"You know," Beth said after catching her friend staring at her. "Boyfriends aren't that bad. There are some good things, too." She felt like something of an expert on the subject, compared to her present audience. "It's like, at least you have a boyfriend, and you can, you know, do stuff with him."

At that, Jane's eyes widened and she stopped fiddling with her shoe. "Stuff? Like what kind of stuff did you do?" she asked.

"Well I haven't done that much, but I've been up to second base so far, I guess,"

Beth answered, proud of the casual tone she had mustered.

"You French kissed him and let him go up your shirt? Where? Not at the school?" Jane asked in awe.

"Yeah. In the shop room while everyone else was at lunch," Beth said as she began to trail her fingers through the water in the fountain, creating circles and lines in the coin-littered pool.

"You didn't get caught?"

"Nope."

"Were you scared?"

"Uh, yeah. I guess I was."

They paused as Beth stood up to get a better view, hoping that Brian would see her sooner if she were standing.

"Did you like it?" Jane asked, curious.

Beth looked down at her friend, her face becoming softer as she remembered. She recalled standing in the darkened shop room, surrounded by dismantled, broken-down cars. Back up against the tool shelf, holding her Disney World tee shirt, bought there last summer, up to her chin while her tiny breasts were tugged and grabbed. She remembered how, for the rest of the day, her shoes had a slick film under them from the pool of motor oil she had been standing in. And how she spent the rest of the day feeling like she was going to fall.

"What time is it?" Beth asked.

"7:14. Did you like it?"

Beth looked at her best friend.

"No, I didn't like it. It was dumb," she answered, knowing that it had been.

"Seems like it would be. Anyway, I'm hungry. Do we have to sit here anymore? We can go get one of those Slushie things at the food court if you want. They have a new flavor. I think it's watermelon," Jane offered as she counted her money.

"Yeah, okay. Let's go," Beth replied, giving the area around the fountain one quick last search. "But let's hurry in case he might come while we're gone."

As they stood in the line waiting to order their drinks, Jane turned to Beth and said, "See, isn't this better than just sitting?"

Beth nodded and smiled at Jane, but in her mind she was remembering that day in school when she had walked past her friends with Brian at her side. She remembered how heavy his arm was, draped over her shoulder, and how she saw those first seeds of envy fresh in her girlfriends' smiles. Beth knew that once Jane got a boyfriend, she would understand better, and Beth was overcome with a sudden urge to hug her.

The Sycamore Tree
Mark McConnell

dash of green —
thrash of leaf
blot —
on landscape
blue horizon
illuminates

I Wanted to Balance a Bicycle
Evangelos Giovanis

I wanted to balance a bicycle,
and I was young.

I want to fall —
and I'm old.

I can't unbalance.

"Tell me what they served tonight, Mommy," Hannah says. "But only the stuff I won't care that I missed." For a moment, her sweet voice drowns out the beep of the monitors.

I begin. I tell her about the Brussels sprouts, the creamed corn, the long strips of liver smothered in onions. Then I move on to the snails, the kiwi, the refried beans.

"What else?" Hannah asks.

For her I come up with something.

"Meat loaf," I say in a disgusted tone. "Fried catfish with the eyes still attached. Cottage cheese."

"What about the cafeteria trays? Were they dirty again?" She needs to know.

"Of course," I tell her. "And the little plastic forks had broken teeth again, too."

She settles for a moment, lying back against the pillows and closing her sunken green eyes. I kiss the top of her head, the place where her brown waves were before the chemo. The smoothness feels cool against my lips.

"Remember last year? At the amusement park?" Hannah asks, suddenly stirred up again.

For her, I remember.

"You were only nine years old," I tell her. "Too young to ride a Ferris wheel alone. But you insisted in that grown-up way you always do, and I caved." She longs to hear this.

"Just when it was your turn at the top…" I lilt my voice, building the suspense. "Something went wrong. Someone flicked the wrong switch. Or maybe there was a short in the wires. I don't know. All I remember is you sitting in that chair, dangling what, fifty feet in the air?"

"It was more like a hundred, Mommy."

"Right. A hundred. Anyway, I can see it now. The way the wind kept shaking your chair, tossing you around in the seat. You were gripping the bar so tightly your knuckles turned white. You were really scared, terrified. You just kept praying, 'God, do something before this whole chair flies off the hinges and crashes to the ground.' And when you finally did get off that thing, you threw up all over your sneakers."

I wait to see if she's satisfied. I'm not sure I have much more in me tonight.

"I won't miss that day," Hannah says, the monitors drowning her out this time.

"I know, baby," I whisper, softly stroking her hand.

I wake in the morning with my legs stuck to vinyl. After four hours of twisted sleep, the recliner the nurses placed beside Hannah's hospital bed has me trapped. I inch my fingers under my thighs and free myself.

Hannah is still asleep. I pray that's all it is as I run my knuckles lightly across her face. The corners of her mouth turn slightly upward from my touch and I start to breathe again. Her face is bloated, doughy. I feel like I can press dimples into her cheeks, mold her nose into a different shape. The site of her IV has become a purple blotch from another collapsed vein. She has the veins of a heroin addict. I can only wish.

"Tell me about Grandpa Edward's dog." Hannah is awake now and it begins again.

"He was little," I tell her. "But he was scrappy. A real vicious thing."

I lift a cup of ice chips to her mouth and she swirls the tiny crystals on her tongue.

"One morning Grandpa went out to buy a paper and left that dog alone with Grandma May."

"Bad move," Hannah says.

"That's for sure," I tell her. "'Cause just when Grandma May laid down on the couch to watch The Price Is Right, that dog jumped right up and bit her on the eye."

I watch Hannah's face flinch and I am happy she is comforted.

"When Grandpa Edward got back," I continue, "Grandma May was standing over the kitchen sink, screaming her head off, her eyeball dripping blood all over the white porcelain. And what was that crazy dog doing? Clawing at Grandma May's legs, tearing her nylon stockings to shreds."

I adjust the strings on Hannah's johnny, rub her back gently with the palm of my hand.

"That's one dog I won't miss," she says.

The Good Doctor appears and Hannah's face brightens. He is the Good Doctor because he says things to Hannah like, "You know what my wife served for breakfast this morning? Octopus! And she didn't even have the decency to take the tentacles off! I can still feel those long, slimy arms in my stomach, wrapping around my intestines. Man, I think I'm gonna barf."

He is the Good Doctor because he tells me "maybe a month" before he pulls the curtain around Hannah's bed and suggests I spend an hour at the park across the street.

"Wait, Mommy!" Hannah cries as I get up to leave her room. "When you get to the park, don't forget to have some frozen lemonade."

I am wearing down.

"Sure," I say, managing only a half-smile before I slip through the door and close it quietly behind me.

The park is ablaze with life. Everything in it is running, buzzing, or flying. Mothers entice their toddlers with juice boxes and packages of peanut butter cookies. In exchange, they rub sunblock on their children's noses, and I imagine the kids smell like mini macaroons. The moms kneel in the grass to tie up Nikes and rework disheveled ponytails for the tenth time that day. I am jealous.

A formation of tiny overalls takes turns on the slide. They let out high-pitched wails as they stretch their arms upward and glide down the slick metal to their mother's waiting embrace. They will remember this day as a good one.

Above this barrage of happiness looms the Children's Hospital, where in a tiny room on the cancer ward, the motto is, "Life is easier to let go of when there's nothing about it to miss." Good memories aren't permitted there. Instead, everything is remembered for its danger, its pain, its ugliness, its grief.

Just outside the park, I finger a bouquet of lemon-yellow roses on a street vendor's cart. I linger longer than I should, inhaling the gentle aroma, picturing them arranged in a crystal vase beside Hannah's hospital bed. With a power that seems beyond my control, I slide a crisp ten dollar bill from my wallet and gently place it in the wrinkled, outstretched hand.

When I get back, Hannah is watching a King Kong movie on a tv that looks like it's suspended in midair in the corner of her room. Her fingers shield her face like prison bars and she separates them every few seconds to catch a glimpse of the out-of-control ape.

"What are those?" Hannah asks when she sees the roses. On her face is a mixture of confusion and fear.

"They're for you," I tell her, smiling. I place the flowers at the foot of her bed. "I know how much you used to love helping Grandma May with her rose bushes and I thought..."

"Mommy! Stop it!"

"I just thought it would be nice for you to have something beautiful."

"I don't want them! Get them out of here!" Hannah kicks violently at her sheets and the roses tumble to the floor.

"Just one thing, Hannah. Can't you remember just one beautiful thing?" I ask angrily. "How about the moon? Or maybe the sun?" I move to the window and pull up the blinds with such force they almost topple from their hinges. "Can you at least remember the sun?"

"Stop it Mommy!" Hannah gasps. Her breathing is labored, despite the oxygen tube beneath her nose.

"What about the color pink? Or Beauty and the Beast?" I am sitting at the edge of the bed now, gripping my daughter tightly by the shoulders. She strains against my hands, and I press my fingers deeper into her skin.

"I need you to remember, Hannah," I say, my voice shaking with rage. "I can't let you go unless you remember."

"Please Mommy," Hannah sobs, tears streaming down her cheeks. "Please. Stop it."

"I'm sorry, baby," I say, suddenly releasing my grip on her shoulders. I pull Hannah close and she buries her wet face in my neck. "It's okay," I whisper, rocking her slowly in my arms.

I spend the rest of the afternoon redeeming myself. I tell Hannah about drinking lemonade at the park and the pain that shot across my forehead. Then I throw in a story about a kid who tumbled from the junglegym and landed square on his face. Hannah listens intently as I describe how the little boy's mother picked pieces of glass and sand from his open wound, and all is right with her world.

Shortly after Hannah is buried, her casket draped with yellow roses, a well-meaning friend gives me a present—1,000 Things to be Happy About. The book sits on my night-stand, next to a picture of Hannah. My biggest fear is that I will never read it. My second biggest fear is that I will.

Jeremy Sadler

Slipping Through
Jessica D'Abrosca

She held her own life in her hands,
as if
it were the ocean in a paper cup.
Each step was carefully calculated
so she wouldn't
fall
(she always fell).

Day after day she walked on eggshells,
the sharp
pieces began to annoy her and when she
cried out in pain her body rocked and the

Water slowly slipped from the cracks of her
pink fingers
gone white from the selfish force of
keeping herself closed and the ocean
bottled
(she always fell).

In My Youth
Leigh Matheu

We ran from the fire we started,
quick streaks of blue and gold
winding through the trees,
and hid up on the levy.
With calves tingling,
mouths softly panting,
we could hardly believe
our own audacity.
Brown gritty dirt
was warm on our knees,
and the dust caused our eyes to leak.
The heat indicator
was up around 110,
with the air pressing hard against us,
scorching our throats.
Silently we crouched,
counting the ties
on the abandoned railroad tracks.
We imagined we could hear
the sharp pop and crack
of the bush as it burned
from the inside out.
The sound of wailing sirens
interrupted our desperate fantasies,
pulling tightly at our skin.
With morbid fascination
we stared out at the sky,
and as day turned to dusk,
the smoke covered up the moon.

Winter in this World
Anthony Loffredio

"Somewhere in this world it's summer," she says as she hands me a glass, and I listen to the snow falling outside, attaching itself to the window. I hand her back the bottle and watch it reflect the fire for that one brief moment. For some reason I'm wondering if she had noticed the light on the bottle, but she sits there in that meditating, yoga position with the wine glass between her legs, and more cheap wine pouring in. "January, February and March are some of the worst months of the year," she says. "You know what I mean? Everything just kind of ends after Christmas and New Years, and you find yourself waiting around for something to happen, and it never does."

I didn't know what to say to this, so I just nodded my head. I looked out of the window again, and saw an old man walking his dog under the streetlights. "Well at least there's snow. We always have snow to keep things interesting," I said, looking back at her. I felt that I filled the silence nicely, kept giving her things to bounce off of, so that any moment of prolonged silence wouldn't feel too uncomfortable. She looked at me and smiled, as if she hadn't thought of that. I sat up and felt triumphant, as if I had solved a problem that had been plaguing the world for years, but then I thought of Florida and Iran. I wondered what it was they did to pass the time in January and February.

She took a sip from her glass, and put her fingers to her lips, trying to talk as she swallowed, "Ugh...I hate snow, that's the worst part about it. You try driving as far as I've got to drive to get to work all week in the snow, sliding all around, people still driving like idiots, like the snow makes no difference or something."

"Maybe it doesn't make a difference."

She threw her hands into the air. "It makes all the difference."

"I guess it depends," I said.

"On what?" She was getting defensive.

"On four-wheel drive." It sounded stupid, but I said it anyway.

"Well I don't have four-wheel drive."

"I guess that's because your car just sucks," I said.

"You're an asshole," she laughed. We were sitting there arguing about something that was falling heavier and thicker by the minute, laughing because it filled up those empty spaces. I felt the warmth from the fire, and myself getting to know her. I watched as her cat leapt from couch to couch, prowling around the room with it's shadow keeping pace, moving so quickly that I wondered how it could. The cat turned around and looked back at me just before it ran into the kitchen, and I wondered how I would have felt if its shadow had stayed behind and stared at me a little bit longer. Then she started coming at me, real slow, on all fours. She rubbed her face against mine, saying in a low, soft voice, "Are you making fun of me?" Her voice tickled my ear and I wondered if I wasn't making fun of her. The tip of her nose traced the outline of my cheek, and before I could answer she was kissing me. Before I had anymore time to think about it. We both fell to the carpet, she was still

on top, and I found this all quite amusing. Two hours ago I thought we were just friends, new acquaintances. People who knew the same people, who hung out a couple of times, and would now know each other. But none of this really mattered to me at the moment, because now we were on the floor kissing and groping, and it really had been so long since I had felt anyone near me like this.

Just then she rolled off me, pushing her short, blonde hair out of her eyes. She was ditzy, but she was cute, the kind of cute you want to care about but never commit to. I laid there hoping she wasn't too fond of me, that there was some fault she might find. The wine was making me talk more loosely, and I realized that I would have to shut myself off before I said anything that I would end up walking home in the cold for.

"Why are your hands so cold?" she asked. She was holding my hands.

I looked down at our hands. "I don't know, I didn't notice."

"Yes, look, feel them." She put her hands to my own face and arms, but I still couldn't feel the cold, I felt it pressing in on every window in the house but I couldn't feel it on me. I sat up and watched the snow fall in the light of the streetlamp outside; her eyes followed mine, she looked at what I was looking out of. Her hand somehow found my hand; hers wasn't like other hands, it was different, not all that better, but different.

"Why do you keep looking out the window? Do you want to be here?" she asked quietly, but not seriously. I looked up at her leaning over my shoulder, I didn't know where I wanted to be, there was really nowhere to go, there were just certain things I couldn't go back to, and she didn't have four-wheel drive.

"No, I'm fine," I said. "I was just watching the snow outside. It's falling in sheets instead of pieces." The bottom of the window was fogging up as we both crawled towards it to get a closer look at the storm. I noticed that all traces of the old man's walk were gone, and that the world looked both dead and new at the same time. She brought my hand up to the window and moved my finger along the glass. "We're going to make pictures," she said. She guided my finger along the bottom of the window, making intricate shapes, a star, a half moon, the beginnings of a happy face whose smile ran down like rain on the window sill. I felt the cold enter my finger. She was guiding it along the window, drawing these pictures, whatever came to her, never knowing what was coming next. From image to image I let her guide me until the window was completely clear of fog, and we could both see outside again.

"So, do you really want me to drive you home in all that snow?" It was a question that was meant to have only one answer. I thought of the cold and how long it was going to last. It felt like I had been here since the beginning of winter, and would have to stay until the beginning of spring. And I know it probably wasn't the right time or place, but I started to think about last winter, when it would snow at least three times a week. And how me and that other girl would always be outside shoveling it. I was wondering where I'd go now. How many more times I would end up in places like this, in situations like this one, still remembering a small place in time when I was comfortable and didn't have to worry.

"No," I said. "Why would I have you drive me back in all this?"

Everything looked wild and noisy outside, but I knew that as soon as I stepped out into it, it would be as hushed as the sound of leaves falling on graves in a cemetery.

Kneeling there at the window, I felt as if I were somewhere else, someplace far away. Like I was lost and then placed into another world which existed only inside the doors and windows of her apartment. I realized that maybe now I'd be wandering for a long time, ending up in these worlds, other people's places and friends, spending time walking in and out of people's lives until I found something to walk into on my own. I was still back there somewhere, shoveling snow in a winter that froze its way into everything that I did, and because of that I felt like the girl next to me knew everything. But that's absurd. I thought of where I would sleep tonight. I knew where I would sleep tonight. Her name is Louise Riser, she is holding my hands, and that's all I really know. I know more about the snow outside than I do about her. What is outside has always been there. I used to roll around in it when I was a kid. Pretty soon I'll probably be rolling around in something else. I hope that the plows come early in the morning.

Summer
Sandra N. Godinho

It's skin:
sun-kissed,
lotion-slathered,
aloe-moistened,
constantly peeling.
Insecurity in dirty, white dressing rooms.
Colorful towels crowding the clothesline.
It's sand:
in your suit,
between your toes,
coating the car floor.
It's zinc oxide decorating like tribal stripes.
It's plastic flip flops,
thong sandals,
and jellies:
rainbow soles for $2.99.
It's salt-water-blue-chlorine baths,
drinking from the hose,
skating circles around pedestrians,
patrolling the crowded sidewalks,
and fleeing policemen
who yearn for freedom
from their constricting blue polyester uniforms—
running out in an over-sized T-shirt
to buy a Cannonball from Peter Palagi:
that plastic cone filled with pastel sherbet
covering the sphere of bubble gum
makes the season.
Driving with the windows down,
letting your wet, sun-bleached locks
flap like dark seaweed in the wind—
going to buy Del's lemonade
and magazines
and bags of ice.
It's humid-laden nights
that smell like charcoal,
roses,
citronella,
meat,
and pool chemicals.
Nights where a sheet
is too much covering
and flannel is replaced
with silk and cotton,
where electrical storms overpower fireworks
and mosquitoes overpower flesh,
saturated with barbecue feasts,
active sweat,
and UV rays.

Cycling
Kevin Fox

Ears pinned back
A little black terrier chases.

Around a bend a headwind rails
Relentlessly, swallows the songs of birds.

Rain runs along a ditch. I hear
It before I see it, a gentle kiss
Upon a gravel path. Yellow faces
Scatter, searching for the sun. Even
Sunflowers appear confused
About the weather.

Beyond a stone wall
Red poppies soften
A field of brown wheat.

On glistening tar
Wet rubber hisses and
Spits.

When we were young, my brother and I used to play a game. It was called Dare of the Day, and I don't remember when we started playing or why, just that we did, we always did, and we must have thought that we always would.

My brother was six years older than me, and from what I've learned from others, most brothers that much older couldn't be bothered with their younger brothers. But not Brian, my brother. He loved me. He was my dad and my bodyguard. But he also got me into a lot of trouble.

One time we were playing Dare of the Day. That morning Brian had dared me to find a wild animal and bring it home. I dared Brian to find a wild animal, kill it, and bring it home. Brian dared me to find a wild animal, kill it, bring it home, and somehow convince Mom to cook it for supper. Now, when the dare got to the level that neither one of us could top it, we both set out to accomplish the dare of the day. Whichever one of us did it, or came closest, won. We didn't have to bet any money or anything–bragging rights were plenty.

So off we went. We split up, of course, as we always did. The plan was for us to be independent of each other, to get into our own adventures, so we'd have something to talk about after the dare was done. We didn't have a tv. Neither one of us read much. The dare of the day kept us going, more so me, of course. While Brian had his life of the six-year-older brother that I was unaware of, the dare of the day was something we were equals on.

I went off to the city. First, I went to my favorite place in the city for lunch, Bucket 'O' Fries. I ordered a big bucket of fries to go. They were good and cheap, and they always seemed to give me extra 'cause I was a kid. I went to the fixin's bar and smothered them with mustard, salt and ketchup. I loved them fries, they were big and thick, yet still greasy. I figured I could use a few leftover fries as bait for an animal.

Now, I knew there were no wild animals in the city, but I figured I could trap a squirrel or a lost cat down an alley, and kick its brains in. So I was just walking around for a few hours. I was about twelve, I guess. I finally saw what looked like good enough, a little lost dog.

He was a cute little thing, one of those black and white Dalmatians that hang out in fire houses. He looked hungry. I looked to my bucket of fries. I had eaten them all! I ran to a nearby newsstand, where I bought some candy, and caught up with the dog. I threw a piece of chocolate and caramel down in front of him and watched him eye it. He had probably never had candy before. He looked like a pup that was used to dog food from a bowl. He sniffed it. He licked it. He ate it.

I snapped my fingers. He followed me a few steps. I tried to corner him down an alleyway but he wouldn't follow. Then I heard a familiar voice. "Michael." I looked up, and in the summer sunlight it was hard to focus. Then it came to me, it was Mrs. Montague, my third grade teacher. I hadn't talked to her in a few years. I was surprised she remembered me. "Michael, I see you've grown up. What's your dog's name?"

"Uh, Bucket, ma'am. His name is Bucket."

"Well, he's a wonderful little dog. How have your grades been?"

"Uh, just fine, ma'am."

"And are you still struggling with mathematics?"

"Uh, no, ma'am, I've gotten much better."

"And how is your mother doing, the poor dear?"

"Uh, she's fine, ma'am. Couldn't be better."

"And your brother, he was a student of mine once upon a time. He must have graduated high school by now?"

"Uh, no, ma'am. He got held back. "

"Oh, that's unfortunate. You know my husband manages the textile mill. You should have Brad ask him for a job."

"Uh, yes, ma'am."

Now, what I had been noticing was the whole time Mrs. Montague had been talking, ol' Bucket was just sitting there on his haunches right beside me, sweating through his tongue like dogs do. It was damn reassuring. His tameness would make it easier to kill him.

When ol' Montague left, I gave Bucket another piece of chocolate caramel for being so patient. This time he didn't even have to sniff it or lick it. He just snatched it out of my hand. He was getting real friendly.

So I walked a bit down the alleyway and snapped for him. This time he followed. I looked around the corner. There was nobody. I petted Bucket's head. I made eye contact with him. I heard that could mesmerize an animal. I gave him one last wish. I took a few steps back to get a running start. I looked at Bucket. Bucket looked at me. I ran up two giant strides and let loose. I got him good in the head. A miserable whimper. A stream of blood on concrete.

I didn't have a plan of what to do with the animal to get him home. I thought it would be too suspicious to just pick him up and carry him all the way home. There would be too many people. I went back to the place where I bought the chocolate. I told them I was collecting cans, and asked if I could have a cardboard box. They gave me one, and it looked about the right size. I ran back to Bucket. He was still dead.

I found out that the box was just a little too small to easily fit Bucket in. I had to snap his neck to make it fold up on top of the body. It was messy, blood and ooze were getting all over my hands. But it would do.

It was almost getting dark, close to supper time. I hurried two miles by foot to get back home. I dropped Bucket off in the backyard. I washed my hands off with the garden hose. I still smelled rank like a dead animal, but Mom was used to me and my brother smelling bad, so I thought maybe she wouldn't notice.

I snuck inside, avoiding Mom, who I figured was in the kitchen cooking. I hadn't figured out how to get Mom to cook Bucket. I had never figured that part of the plan out–this was a real good dare of the day. I could hear Mom talking to somebody, somebody who wasn't my brother, because Mom was talking all nice and polite. Company would make it even harder to sneak Bucket by Mom. I ran upstairs.

There was Brian, getting dressed. He was putting on a tie. "Put your best clothes on Michael, we got company."

"Company?"

"Yeah, company." Brian was now putting on some of Dad's cologne, one of the few gifts Dad left us when he split.

"Well, what about the dare? I've almost got it won."

"The dare? Oh, Christ. Yeah, the dare. What was it today?"

"Get a wild animal and get Mom to have it for dinner. You didn't remember?"

"Yeah, I remembered. It was my idea, wasn't it? All right, well I won. I got a filly."

"A what?"

"Oh Christ, don't you know anything? A filly is a female horse."

"You got a horse here, Brian? Did you kill it yet? Can I help?"

"No, Christ no, I didn't kill it, and you can't help me kill it. I'm just jazzing ya. I didn't get a horse. It's just that the Smiths are going out to a fancy dinner tonight for their twenti-

eth wedding anniversary, so they sent their daughter Amanda over to eat with us. See, smart people call girls fillies. I was just seeing if you were smart."

"Well, what about the dare of the day? Didn't you kill anything, Brian, even a squirrel or something?"

"Christ, what have I got against squirrels? You know, Mike, this Dare of the Day thing...we're getting a little old for it. Maybe someday if Mom gets married again and has another kid, and if it's a boy, you can play with him like I've played with you. But the dare of the day? Let's just put that stuff behind us."

"And what if mom has a girl?"

I took a shower, and was able to get most of the dog smell off me. I went downstairs and had dinner with Brian, the Smiths' daughter, and Mom. It was good enough dinner-meat loaf, potatoes. I looked at my mom, how she was trying so hard without Dad around. I looked at Brian and felt funny. He had spent a lot of time with me, and I wondered if that time would have been better spent studying, trying to get out of high school. I looked at Amanda Smith. She was fifteen, right between me and my brother's age. That was the first time I thought a girl was pretty.

It was weird for everyone to try and talk and eat. Mostly, Mom and Amanda Smith talked about flowers, a common interest. Mom grew a lot in her garden. Brian talked about how great it was that the Smiths had been married twenty years, then Mom looked uncomfortable, like she felt bad. I tried to change the subject, so I told everyone I saw Mrs. Montague in the city, and how she said for Brian to see her husband about the textile job. Brian gave me a weird look.

"Well, the next time you see Mrs. Montague you can tell her thanks but I'm going to graduate high school. I'm even going to go to college."

I never knew if Brian was serious or was just trying to impress Amanda Smith.

After dinner, Mom was going to wash the dishes when Brian volunteered me and him to do it. Mom asked Amanda if she wanted to see some of her flowers. Brian and I were just done clearing the table when we heard female screaming from the backyard. I dropped a plate, and if it wasn't plastic it would have crashed to pieces. A lump grew in my throat and a hole burned in my stomach. I forgot all about ol' Bucket! Brian ran outside to see what was the matter. I had two choices. I could run out the front door and try to find Dad, or I could run out the back door and pretend to not know what was going on. I ran out the front door, and have been looking for my father ever since.

Stephen Carter

I'm A Quitter
Jessica Countie

idle are my digits,
no longer fondling Mediums.
my patience melted away with winter,
out of my mouth hangs a splinter
or a sucker;
anything to simulate smoking.

my bloodstream was hijacked;
left barren, salivating for carbon monoxide.
how am i supposed to enjoy food?
how can i be in a good mood?
i get bored
and stare at my favorite ashtray.

one vice almost gone,
about ten left.
this summer, maybe i'll get healthy.
i'm in neutral getting to wealthy.
these willpower aerobics only
add to this stress.

my lungs are two packs of
almost full bulls*— now
cindered, dusty flesh—
or a swiss darkened mesh
of undulating layered tissues
revolting in cataclysm
towards an inevitable cancer.
spectrums of spokes enclose these
two swarthy organs in my thorax,
while my respiration becomes lax
from inhaling smoke and coughing
out soot smoldered in my human coffin.

*full bull- full pack of Marlboro Reds

My home has simply been where I live
Summer Copeland

Everyone has a piece of land they belong to, they long for.
They'll be waiting for me, don't know if the band will be playing,
if the house will still be standing, if the tree I planted lives.
I often dream warnings to stay away, when I wake
I have to change the story.
I don't know if it exists, my home has simply been where I live.
Of course everyone will be there, I'll have time to stop along the way.
A runaway dog will probably follow me,
although I would prefer the company of a cat.
I'll have to draw my own map,
walk through rivers, swamps, forests, over rusted bridges
past city neighborhoods, I'll say hello to the kids out on the stoop.
I'll go through streets with big houses, small houses,
crowds and dust clouds.
I'll always be moving, and I'll always be happy,
leaving is true freedom.
I'll miss you dear but at least you'll know where to find me now.
There's a diner there that never closes,
on the table waits a cup of coffee and a pen.
I'll get a little sad when I start to recognize the air,
remember it's the same everywhere.